



## Beliefs, practices and attitudes of portuguese undergraduate youth

Crenças, práticas e atitudes da juventude universitária portuguesa

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### Abstract

This paper presents results of the author's PhD research: Catholic beliefs and practices, attitudes toward marriage, life and sexuality. The empirical support is a survey made to a sample of 500 students from Lisbon public universities, using a non-random sampling in two phases, first a quota sampling and after a convenience one. There are some results that stand out. More than half of students of the sample call themselves Catholic and believe in the dogmatic representations about God, Jesus and Mary, though other dogmatic beliefs as hell, purgatory and resurrection are much lower. There is some spirituality among students, although the importance of God is less important. The frequencies of the Mass, prayer, Holy Communion, confession are all very low. The attitudes toward marriage, life and sexuality lie between 'some' and 'very', with abortion having the smallest rating and contraception the highest. In general, undergraduate youth is away from the norms of the Church. At the same time, these youngsters believe and belong more than they practice.

**Keywords:** Beliefs. Practices. Attitudes. Portugal. Undergraduate students.

### Resumo

Este artigo apresenta resultados da tese de doutoramento do autor: crenças e práticas católicas, atitudes em relação ao casamento, à vida e à sexualidade. O suporte empírico é um inquérito aplicado a uma amostra de 500 estudantes das universidades públicas de Lisboa, usando uma amostragem não aleatória em duas fases, primeiro a amostragem por quotas e depois a amostragem por conveniência. Há alguns resultados que se destacam. Mais do que metade da amostra denomina-se católica e acredita nas representações dogmáticas de Deus, Jesus e Maria, embora outras crenças dogmáticas como inferno, purgatório e ressurreição sejam bastante mais baixas. Há alguma espiritualidade entre os estudantes, embora menos considerem que Deus seja importante. A frequência da Missa, oração, comunhão, confissão é muito baixa. As atitudes relativamente ao casamento, vida e sexualidade estão entre 'alguma' e 'muita', tendo o aborto o valor mais pequeno e a contraceção o valor maior. Na generalidade, a juventude universitária está afastada das normas da Igreja. Ao mesmo tempo, eles acreditam e pertencem mais do que praticam.

**Palavras-chave:** Crenças. Práticas. Atitudes. Portugal. Estudantes universitários.

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## Introduction

Historically, Portugal has been a Catholic country. Throughout most of its history, Church and Crown were bound by strong links and by mutual interest. Nevertheless, since the second half of the eighteenth century, this old, solid union started to crack (Coutinho, 2011, p. 61). The split between the Catholic Church and the State became stronger, but only in the April Revolution (1974) the religious pluralism was put into action, even though safeguarded by law since the first quarter of the nineteenth century (Coutinho, 2011, p. 70). Today, the Church and the State are completely separated.

Comparatively to the rest of Europe, secularization was delayed due to the late urbanization. The rural masses only became urban during the twentieth century (Coutinho, 2011, p. 69). Urbanization and industrialization were two of the most important processes that have helped to transform the religious landscape. The total dependence of nature, of the natural elements, predisposed men to negotiate with the gods. Fear and reverence to God and the Church ruled over centuries the rural minds. Confession and predication were the weapons in this context. Free from the rural constraints, the new urban man, anonymous in the midst of the crowd, was only but one among thousands others. Released from the communitarian control of his peers he could do what pleased him.

The political freedom achieved in 1974 and the cultural revolution of May 1968 transformed forever Portugal, as they stand for a clash between tradition and modernity. Thenceforward, tradition is no longer respected as such but only if pertinent and adjusted to our needs and desires. Increasingly, the authority of the Church is only valued and followed whenever it is rationally comprehended and accepted. For many, its rules are seen as unacceptable and, hence, not adopted. This is the most powerful indicator of individual secularization. This article intends to supply fresh results about the situation of Catholicism within Portuguese youth. Thus, it intends to test the so-called secularization thesis at the level of the individual, of his/her beliefs, practices and values/attitudes.

Religion in substantive terms can be seen has a system composed by descriptions of the sacred, answers to world and life meanings (beliefs), means, signs, binding experiences with the sacred (practices), normative orientations of behaviour (values) and collective actors with own rules and resources (collectivities) (Coutinho, 2011, p. 17). The variables

used here represent very well Catholicism, as they simultaneously identify Catholic parameters and differentiate them from other religions and Christian confessions.

Nowadays youth is farther removed from religion than adults (Coutinho, 2011, p. 87-91), contrary to decades ago when religiosity was part of the life cycle (Lambert, 1993, p. 525). As there are many substitutes for religion, youngsters grow disconnected from religion (Coutinho, 2011, p. 80-84). Also their upbringing induces values which separate them even more from religious or supernatural concerns (González-Anleo and González-Anleo, 2008, p. 240; González-Anleo, 2006, 259; Blasco, 2004, p. 137). Nevertheless, the undergraduate students, with a higher educational capital and in some cases a higher cultural and economic capital, should have more supernatural questions. This richness of capital possibly induces more concerns with the future and with the self.

## **1 Secularization**

The paternity of the secularization theory is often attributed to Weber, though religion only interested him as a dimension of modernity, an attitude kept by early twentieth-century sociology (Tschannen, 1992, p. 294-295). By then, however empirical studies on religion were emerging on both sides of the Atlantic; secularization emerged as an analysis tool in the second half of the twentieth century (Tschannen, 1992, p. 295-296).

The development of the theory of secularization in the 1960s was due to Wilson, Berger and Luckmann. For Wilson, secularization is identified with the decline of community (Wilson, 1976, p. 265). The societalization, i.e., the transition from community to society, from a world based on custom and tradition to one founded on reason, science and technology, makes the salvation offered by religion in the afterlife irrelevant; man is taught to save himself in this life (Wilson, 1976, p. 265-267).

For Berger (1990, p. 133-134), the long historical process of disenchantment of the world led to the opening of the world to rational inquiry: rationality extended to all spheres of society and freed them from religion, except in the private sphere where it remains relevant (privatization). By removing the monopoly of the churches, rationalization leads to

pluralization, in which religious or secular groups compete with each other (Berger, 1990, p. 135-138).

For Luckmann, differentiation encourages autonomization, pluralization and privatization. Autonomization means that social spheres are released from religious norms and are legitimized only by the functions they play (Luckmann, 1970, p. 101). By allowing the emergence of various contents of ultimate meaning, pluralization permits individual choices, since religion becomes a private matter (Luckmann, 1970, p. 98-99).

Dobbelaere (1999, 1981) presented the most influential and well-developed three-dimensional theory of secularization: societal, organizational and individual levels. According to Dobbelaere (1999, p. 236-241), at the micro or individual level, privatization led to the individualization: individuals choose their beliefs, norms and religious practices. The loss of Church authority, the pluralization and individualization brought forth the religious bricolage, a concept that implies the individual composition of religion. Thus, the religion of each individual becomes "à la carte" with a mix of doctrines, heterodox beliefs and various degrees of belief and disbelief. For instance, the decline of belief in a personal God led to the abandonment of the Christian practices related to this core assumption.

Chaves (1994: 757) gave a new breadth to secularization theory by affirming that secularization was not anymore a decrease of religiosity but of authority in the three levels: the societal level, given the growing inability of religious elites to exercise authority over other institutional spheres; at the organizational level, given the decline in the control of religious authority of organizational resources in the religious sphere; at the individual level, given the decrease in the control of religion in individual actions.

## **2 Method**

As mentioned, the research study targeted Portuguese undergraduate students. Given the practical impossibility of surveying the entire population, I opted for finalist undergraduate students in state universities. Indeed, 76 per cent of Portuguese undergraduate students are in the public system, of which 47 per cent are in state universities (2008/09 figures). Likewise, in the Lisbon region (*distrito*), these percentages stand at 66 per cent and 54 per cent, respectively. In order to gather a representative sample

of the inquired population, I applied first a non-random sampling method, the quota one. In this sampling, a few criteria were used: the disciplinary area, the course, the institution and the gender. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample among the four criteria. The next step was to apply a random simple sampling. However, teachers' availability imposed a convenience sampling. The survey had to take place in the classrooms. Initially, I hoped to randomly select the teachers, but soon I realised that this would have been very cumbersome and would not significantly improve the reliability of the sample. This option is naturally debatable.

**Table 1** – Sample distribution by course, field of study, institution and gender

<b>Courses - Disciplinary area - Faculty/University</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Women</b>
Sociology - Law, Social Sciences and Services - ISCTE-IUL	30	19
Management - Economics, Management and Accounting - ISCTE-IUL	47	23
Biology - Sciences - FC/UL	38	20
Law - Law, Social Sciences and Services - FD/UL	65	42
Languages, literatures and cultures - Arts - FL/UL	59	35
Medicine - Health - FCM/UNL	57	41
Political science and international relations - Law, Social Sciences and Services - FCSH/UNL	25	16
Architecture - Architecture, Art and Design - FA/UTL	44	28
Economics - Economics, Management and Accounting - ISEG/UTL	33	16
Civil engineering - Technologies - IST/UTL	102	24
<i>Total</i>	500	264

Note: The acronyms of the institutions are in Portuguese but their full names are translated to English. Universities: ISCTE-IUL - Higher Institute of Business and Labour Sciences-Lisbon University Institute, UL - University of Lisbon, UNL - University Nova of Lisbon, UTL - Technical University of Lisbon. Faculties: FC - Faculty of Sciences, FD - Law Faculty, FL - Faculty of Arts, FCM - Faculty of Medical Sciences, FCSH - Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, FA - Faculty of Architecture, ISEG - School of Economics and Management, IST - Technical Higher Institute.

According to Reis and Moreira (1993, p. 155-156), for a finite population the sample dimension can be calculated through the formula:  $n = S^2 / [D^2/(Z_{\alpha/2})^2 + S^2/N]$ . Within the time constraints, I could obtain a sample of 500 students, aged between 19 and 25, with  $\frac{3}{4}$  being of 20 or 21 years old; 47 per cent male and 53 per cent female. The level of precision is equal to (Reis and Moreira, 1993, p. 153):  $\pm D = \pm Z_{\alpha/2} S/\sqrt{n} = \pm 4.4$  per cent ( $Z$ : normal distribution value ( $Z_{\alpha/2} = Z_{0.025} = 1.96$ ), the confidence level is ( $\lambda = 1 - \alpha = 1 - 0.05 = 0.95$ );  $S$ : sample standard deviation (0.5);  $n$ : sample dimension (500)). The data was collected during March 2010.

The survey had questions about Catholic beliefs and practices; attitudes toward marriage, sexuality, life and Church; non-Catholic beliefs and practices; socialization;

important aspects in life. The software used was SPSS. This article presents the results of the univariate analysis. The variables chosen are those which were most important to discriminate the clusters of beliefs, practices and attitudes in the multiple correspondence analyses. Religious belonging, not normally used in these analyses, is going to be included. Baptism and confirmation, two central practices, although not considered the most important, are going to be analysed also because they are sacraments. Though not all Catholic beliefs and the attitudes are regarded as equally significant, they all are going to be dealt together in order to allow for a more complete discussion.

### **3 Results and discussion**

#### **3.1 Religious belonging**

According to EVS (2010), of the 78.4 per cent of the Portuguese youngsters (20-25 years old) who belong to a certain religion, 93.1 per cent are Catholic. Of the respondents, 56.2 per cent consider themselves Catholic and the remaining 43.8 per cent have no religion, which goes against other results, that express the clear preponderance of the Catholics in Portugal (EVS, 2010; ESS, 2008; Ferreira, 2003, p. 36; Fernandes, 2001, p. 339; Silva and Monteiro, 2000, p. 39) and other countries (Giordan, 2009, p. 336). For their part, González-Anleo (2006, p. 250) and González-Anleo (2004, p. 38-40) found an intermediate position, while Hollinger and Smith (2002, p. 35) encountered a closer situation.

These figures might be far from accurate, insofar as the respondents' answers depend on their interpretation. The religious belonging is a concept difficult to translate because it can cover a wide range of meanings, such as baptism, the existence of some beliefs, the frequency of certain practices (e.g. Mass, prayer), the orthodox attitude in relation to aspects of life and sexuality. Given that the respondents may have considered different meanings, the homogeneity in the interpretation was compromised.

According to EVS (2010) the importance of religion is equally distributed between 'very'/'quite' and 'few'/'none'. Thus, half of Portuguese youngsters consider religion

important. The reasons most commonly mentioned by youngsters who consider religion important are moments of personal crisis (death, loneliness or illness), or in times of decision or in crucial aspects in life (González-Anleo, 2004, p. 29; Fernandes, 2001, p. 354). The causes for detachment are mainly the disagreement in beliefs, practices and inherent moral rules, as well as the behaviour of priests and religious leaders (Duque, 2007, p. 72).

### **3.2 Degree of spirituality**

In my results the average is near 'some' (2.87) ('none' - 11 per cent, 'few' - 25 per cent, 'some' - 37.8 per cent, 'quite' - 18 per cent, 'very' - 7.8 per cent, 'DK/NA' - 0.4 per cent). The average response in EVS (2010) is between 'some' and 'few' (2.55). As intermediate alternatives are different, it is not possible to compare the two results directly. The averages are in similar positions, although slightly lower in EVS.

Spirituality, as opposed to religiosity (which implies an institutional route to the sacred), is expressed in direct relationship between the sacred and the person. While according to EVS (2010) 70 per cent of the Europeans are religious (a result very close to that of religious belonging, which may indicate some resemblance in the interpretation of both concepts), the average interest for the sacred and the supernatural is significantly lower.

These results can be interpreted in different ways. First, whilst they have the possibility of going to the supermarket of beliefs and practices and choose the products best suited to their personalities, youngsters are too steeped in materialism to venture beyond the material realm. Second, this search is still constrained by the existing religious institutions, given that religious education is yet an influence. Third, although unemployment and uncertain times, young people have fewer problems than older generations, for whom death, disease and loneliness are more imminent threats. Thus, they are not as pressed as the older individuals to search for solutions for these issues and, accordingly, their quest for the sacred is far from urgent.

### 3.3 Opinion about the influence of earthly behaviour in life after death

The average lies between 'few' and 'some', leaning more to the former (2.26) ('none' - 35.2 per cent, 'few' - 17.2 per cent, 'some' - 22 per cent, 'quite' - 9.6 per cent, 'very' - 5.8 per cent, 'DK/NA' - 10.2 per cent). Notably, this question had a high non-response rate of 10.2 per cent. This agrees with the remaining questions about beliefs, because these are parameters of faith which always display a high degree of uncertainty. By contrast, practices are easier to measure, insofar as they relate to effective behaviours and thus non-response rates tend to be lower.

Answering this question implies a belief in eternal life and the Last Judgement, two Church dogmas, and, above all, in the importance of the salvation of the soul (i.e. to reach heaven in opposition to being left in hell). As mentioned González-Anleo (2004, p. 75-76), the salvation of the soul as a life goal virtually disappeared from juvenile imagination, leaving only two outstanding 'salvations', that of a more just and humane world and that of body and mind.

Moral conscience and behaviours were controlled for centuries by the Church by means of confession, penance and the fear of hell. Nowadays, this rarely happens. In the present, we are far from any kind of religious hegemony and the ecclesiastical control over individual souls is much weaker. Thus, there are no obstacles to the freedom of belief. Individuals have several options to choose from. This explains the weakness in beliefs in life after death, heaven, hell, divine grace and sin. This detracts the meaning of life centred in the salvation of the soul and in the behaviour according to the pronouncements of the Church.

### 3.4 Conceptions about God

The most referred conception about God was 'Some kind of superior power' (25 per cent); the remaining concepts ('Personal God', 'Some kind of spirit or life force', 'Corresponds to Nature', 'I don't know if God exists', 'God doesn't exist') all had values between 11 per cent and 16 per cent (table 2). In EVS (2010), 'Personal God', with 56.4 per



cent, and ‘Some kind of spirit or life force’, with 23.7 per cent, scored considerably higher values. This may be due to fewer options offered in EVS and, hence, the lesser adequacy to the respondents’ exact beliefs. Sceptical and atheist answers are relatively less represented.

The same question, albeit with differently-phrased alternatives, was made by González-Anleo (2006, p. 268) and González-Anleo (2004, p. 69) and the most chosen options clearly were those similar to ‘Personal God’ and ‘Some kind of spirit or life force’. The options ‘What exists of positive in man and woman’ and sceptical and atheist positions were not irrelevant and the latter two increased, while all others decreased. At any rate, the difference in the options offered and in the type of question (simple or multiple answers) affects their comparability.

In the present results, there may have been substantially different interpretations of the options to be chosen from. Nevertheless, looking to table 2 one can associate the first two options to the transcendent sacred and the next two options to the immanent sacred. ‘Personal God’, the orthodox Catholic option, may have been interpreted in different, contrasting ways, a circumstance which may explain its poor choice.

**Table 2 – Distribution of conceptions about God**

		%
Conceptions about God	Personal God	12,8
	Some kind of superior power	25,0
	Some kind of spirit or life force	15,2
	Corresponds to Nature	11,0
	What exists of positive in man and woman	2,8
	I don't know if God exists, but I don't have reasons to believe	16,0
	God doesn't exist	12,4
	DK/NA	4,8
	Total	100,0

However, alternative options were presented, especially those that placed the sacred in the immanent sphere, as influenced by New Age. For these options, there is no transcendence (Lacroix, 2000, p. 35), with the sacred in nature, with a pantheistic cosmos (Duque, 1998, p. 40), a unique spirit (Lacroix, 2000, p. 37). As stated by González-Anleo

(2004, p. 66), the concept or image of a non-Christian God, impersonal, pantheistic is emerging within the world of youngsters.

Aggregating all the answers, excepting only sceptical and atheist positions and non-responses, only 66.8 per cent believe in God, regardless of how they imagine him. In the EVS (2010), the percentage of believers in God is 75.3, a figure slightly above this value. González-Anleo (2006, p. 248, 266) and González-Anleo (2004, p. 62) found close values, if a tendency for decline in recent years. Hollinger and Smith (2002, p. 235) also found similar numbers.

God can be conceived through an extended set of definitions. When asked by a belief in God without specifying the concept, the answer will depend on the representation taken by each respondent. Thus, comparability between studies is difficult, moreover when they are based in different population segments and countries. However, these studies points out that God, regardless of how He is seen, is something still believed by youngsters, especially when compared with other Christian concepts. According to González-Anleo (2006, p. 273), the main reasons why young people do not believe in God are in descending order of importance the notion that God was an invention of the Church and of the clergy, superstition, the existence of evil in the world and having things more important to think about.

### **3.5 Degree of importance of God in life**

The average is 2.57, lying between ‘few’ and ‘some’ (‘none’ - 25.2 per cent, ‘few’ - 21.4 per cent, ‘some’ - 29.4 per cent, ‘quite’ - 13.2 per cent, ‘very’ - 8.4 per cent, ‘DK/NA’ - 2.4 per cent). In the EVS (2010), the average is 6.1, near the middle, but slightly closer to ‘very’, somewhat above the average of this study. The low importance of God in the lives of these youngsters corresponds to the average of the question about the influence of earthly behaviour in afterlife<sup>1</sup>. The absence of an eschatological thinking induces indifference to moral rules. The lack of insecurity about eternal life after death does little to stimulate behaviours aligned with Catholic doctrine. The personal God no longer has

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<sup>1</sup> Pearson’s correlation coefficient (importance of God/earthly behaviour):  $r(443) = 0.651$ ,  $p=0.000$ , which is a medium strong value.

relevance and usefulness for individual salvation and is no longer a focal point. With the spread of holistic, pantheistic culture, the tension passes through the personal development and immersion in the cosmic totality, in which all are part of the sacred whole. As we saw in the previous question, the Judaeo-Christian God, transcendent and personal, has become, for many, old-fashioned.

### **3.6 Catholic representations about God, Jesus and Mary**

38.2 per cent of the respondents do not believe in any of the Catholic dogmas about God. These, together with another 9.4 per cent who did not know what to answer, make up 47.6 per cent of unbelievers. Among believers (52.4 per cent), there is belief in the dogma of eternity (29.6 per cent), uniqueness (27.2 per cent), trinity (22.4 per cent) and world creation (15.6 per cent). The percentage of believers in the Catholic God is quite similar to those who consider themselves Catholics, so the belief in God is possibly one of the most important defining features<sup>2</sup>.

González-Anleo (2006, p. 258) and González-Anleo (2004, p. 30) mention that the young Spaniards increasingly consider the belief in God as the most important concept to define catholicity. Of all the Catholic dogmas about God, 'Creator of the world' was the least adhered to, reflecting perhaps current modernity, in which science and the resulting narratives leave less room for explanations with less scientific content.

Regarding the Catholic dogmas about Jesus, 34 per cent do not believe in any of them. This group, together with another 7.6 per cent who did not know what to answer, makes up 41.6 per cent of unbelievers. For the believers (58.4 per cent), the most believed dogma is 'Man and God' (29 per cent), followed by 'Founder of the Church' (25.4 per cent), 'Saviour of the world' (17.6 per cent), 'Resurrected from dead' (15.4 per cent), 'Rose to heaven' (13.8 per cent), 'Judge in the end of the world' (3.4 per cent). González-Anleo (2004, p. 74) found quite higher values for the 'Son of God'; González-Anleo (2006, p. 266) encountered also slightly higher values for resurrection.

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<sup>2</sup> Cramer's V correlation coefficient (Catholic representations about God/religious belonging):  $V(453) = 0.617$ ,  $p=0.000$ , which is a medium strong value.

Understandably, this variable and the former have relatively strong correlation<sup>3</sup>. This correlation makes sense as both are dogmas related to the two persons of the Holy Trinity. The correlation of this variable with religious belonging is medium<sup>4</sup>. The dogma of Last Judgement has little bearing, perhaps due to weak belief in sin and in life after death. At the same time, the redemption of the world, resurrection and ascension are little-known dogmas, perhaps due to their connection to sin and life after death.

46.6 per cent of the sample does not believe in any of the Catholic dogmas about Mary. These, together with another 10 per cent who did not know what to answer, make up 56.6 per cent of unbelievers. In the believers (43.4 per cent) stands the dogmas of the 'Mother of God' (29 per cent), 'Virgin' (18.6 per cent), 'Rose in heaven in body and soul' (12.2 per cent), 'Conceived without sin' (11.8 per cent). The total is slightly lower than that reported by González-Anleo (2006, p. 248) and the divine maternity is quite smaller than that referred by González-Anleo (2004, p. 75).

This variable is relatively strongly correlated with the representation of God<sup>5</sup>, which makes sense insofar as they are dogmas about two essential figures of the Catholic faith. The correlation of this variable with religious belonging is medium<sup>6</sup>. Perhaps the weak adherence to some of these dogmas results not only from the effective unbelief in them, but also from the ignorance about their meanings, which can occur by semantic unawareness or by the lack of religious socialization.

### 3.7 Catholic beliefs

The adherence to Catholic beliefs varies between 15.8 per cent and 36.6 per cent (figure 1). The highest values are Pope as successor of Saint Peter and head of the Church, sin, heaven and life after death. Non-response rates are high, between 10.6 per cent and

<sup>3</sup> Cramer's V correlation coefficient (Catholic representations about Jesus/Catholic representations about God):  $V(453) = 0.617, p=0.000$ , which is a medium strong value.

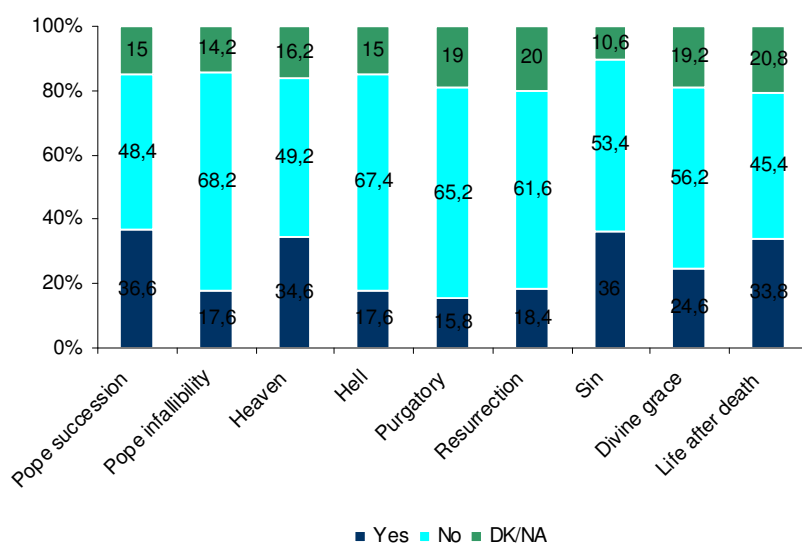
<sup>4</sup> Cramer's V correlation coefficient (Catholic representations about Jesus/religious belonging):  $V(462) = 0.466, p=0.000$ , which is a medium value.

<sup>5</sup> Cramer's V correlation coefficient (Catholic representations about Mary/Catholic representations about God):  $V(425) = 0.653, p=0.000$ , which is a medium strong value.

<sup>6</sup> Cramer's V correlation coefficient (Catholic representations about Mary/religious belonging):  $V(450) = 0.502, p=0.000$ , which is a medium value.

20.8 per cent. This can be explained by a variety of reasons: insufficient response alternatives, questions that are too difficult to answer, weak convictions, tiredness caused by similarity of questions.

In the EVS (2010) the results for all beliefs were higher (life after death - 45 per cent, hell - 30.4 per cent, heaven - 40 per cent, sin - 59.2 per cent), with non-response rates between 3.5 per cent and 11.6 per cent. In González-Anleo (2004, p. 62), the values of life after death, hell, heaven, sin and resurrection are slightly higher, whilst in González-Anleo (2006, p. 248, 266), the values for life after death, heaven, hell, purgatory, sin and resurrection are closer. In Hollinger and Smith (2002, p. 235), the values are slightly higher for heaven and hell. At any rate, the values obtained are low. This can show a disinterest in transcendence, the sacred, the supernatural<sup>7</sup>, as well as a clear detachment from institutional religion. However, it is clear that some beliefs, like hell, purgatory and resurrection are less credible for youngsters.



**Figure 1** - Catholic beliefs distributed by category

Hell has been discredited on account of its folkloric, anthropomorphic imagery of a furnace of fire, where ‘there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth’. Jean-Paul Sartre’s quip expression ‘hell are the others’ has removed from the underworld and placed it in this very

<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, applying Cramer’s V correlation coefficient between the degree of spirituality and the various Catholic beliefs, the only ones to present medium correlation are heaven, divine grace and life after death; the others are very weak or weak (0.171 a 0.520).

world, presenting others as a required obstacle to the achievement of individual projects. Man is seen as a sort of necessary evil rather than the biblical 'neighbour' in need of help.

The small acceptance of purgatory, regarded by Church doctrine as a place for a purification of souls, before their entrance into heaven, is perhaps explained by the same popular representations, which resort to the same imagery of hell and portray the suffering penitents surrounded by flames. In a world that shies away from sorrow, these old-fashioned images are likely to be unwelcomed.

The belief in resurrection has found a rival in the belief in reincarnation. They are mutually exclusive and the adherence to one diminishes if the attraction to the other increases. In fact, the resurrection, with its simultaneous glorification of individuality and transcendence, is opposed to reincarnation, which speaks of the dissolution of the individual in the pantheistic cosmos and of the immanence of the sacred in nature.

The low percentage of believers in papal infallibility is understandable in today's secularized, relativistic and egalitarian world. The notions of absolute truths and hierarchy, with privileges vis-à-vis the masses, are likely to be poorly accepted. As González-Anleo and González-Anleo (2008, p. 43) point out, the youngster, placing himself at the centre of his world, is autonomous of the institutional norms; personal desire is the source of law for him.

### **3.8 Baptism and Confirmation**

83 per cent of the sample is baptized, but only 34.2 per cent have received confirmation. The difference between these two sacraments of the Catholic Church is elucidative of the current religiosity of young people. Although there is still reasonable percentage of respondents that were not baptized (17 per cent), the large majority has been. By contrast with baptism, the sacrament of confirmation implies choice, acceptance, compromise with Catholic faith. Accordingly, the number of the young people confirmed decreases drastically. It can be considered by the Church that confirmation should be an adult, radical sacrament, stating commitment to Catholic faith. Still, given that it is sometimes received without the adequate catechetical preparation and interior disposition, it does not indicate directly the correct number of devout Catholics.

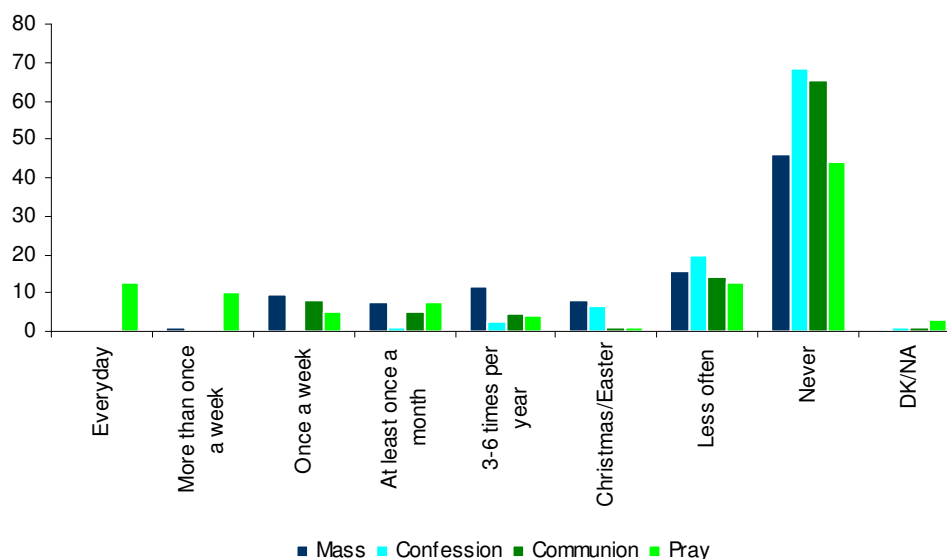
In today's world, where religiosity of the youth tends to be soft and permissive (González-Anleo and González-Anleo, 2008, p. 84), detached from sacrifice and commitment (Cerezo e Serrano, 2006, p. 41-42), confirmation is sought when there is still any familiar or institutional pressure or when the youngster, so confident and deliberate, believes in its effectiveness and wants to give testimony. The value of the confirmed lies very close to that referred by González-Anleo (2004, p. 84), who mentions that the reasons more evoked to receive confirmation are its importance in Christian life and the recommendation of the family.<sup>8</sup>

### **3.9 Catholic practices**

Mass and prayer are more frequent than confession and Holy Communion (figure 2), with the medians of the former being 'less often' and the latter in 'never'. Values of Mass are lower than in ESS (2008), Silva and Monteiro (2000, p. 40), Fernandes (2001, p. 342), and Hollinger and Smith (2002, p. 35). They are more similar to those of González-Anleo (2004, p. 89) and Giordan (2009, p. 338-339), and higher to those of González-Anleo (2006, p. 274). In the EVS (2010), values are approximate, although the category 'never' is lower in this. In regard to confession, the values are close to those presented by González-Anleo (2004, p. 79). In regard to prayer, values obtained are lower than Fernandes (2001, p. 345) and Hollinger and Smith (2002, p. 235), but higher than González-Anleo (2004, p. 95). The present values are similar to EVS (2010), ESS (2008) and González-Anleo (2006, p. 284), even if the category 'never' is lower in the former.

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<sup>8</sup> Theoretically and empirically, the correlation between confirmation and conception about God and Catholic beliefs is pertinent. Nevertheless, they are 0.306 and 0.078/0.430, respectively.



**Figure 2 - Catholic practices distributed by category**

To Duque (2007, p. 68), the main reasons for practicing religion are, in descending order of importance, family education and tradition, personal faith, spiritual comfort and peace of mind. Conversely, the main reasons for not practicing religion are, in descending order of importance, the redundancy of practice to be religious, the lack of time, the behaviour of priests and religious leaders (Duque, 2007, p. 70).

According to Fernandes (2001, p. 345), the main motives to go to Mass are, in descending order of importance, silence and introspection, the feeling of being close to God, family influence and sociability. In contrast, González-Anleo (2006, p. 283) points out the main reasons not to attend Mass: ‘Mass means nothing’, ‘religion no longer matters’, ‘one does not need to go to Mass to be religious’, ‘Mass is very dull’.

González-Anleo (2006, p. 275-276) considers some reasons for not-attendance of Mass by young people. First, with the passage from the cult of work to consumption and leisure, the weekends have been dedicated to celebration and pleasure. Accordingly, the available physical and psychological time goes to everything that is funny, free and spontaneous. Second, the current salvation goes through poverty, nature, body and mind. The liberation from sin and death has little importance for the youth imagery. Third, the mistakes of the Church, the hypocrisy of some Catholics and the distortion of the Mass by some priests after Vatican II.



The prayers youngsters know best are Our Father and Hail Mary (Blasco, 2004, p. 145), but the most frequent are the petitioner prayers, free and spontaneous prayers, Our Father and Hail Mary (González-Anleo, 2006, p. 286; González-Anleo, 2004, p. 96). The prayer, man's relationship with the sacred, can be conducted in numerous ways. The young person may feel freer in the relationship with the sacred instead of feeling trapped and restricted by rites as in Mass. Thus, 12.6 per cent of the respondents pray 'everyday', unlike the remaining practices, of which none is practiced daily. The value of 28 per cent of prayer 'at least once a week' is quite higher than the 10.6 per cent (Mass), 0.6 per cent (confession) or 8.6 per cent (Holy Communion).

The decline of Holy Communion is directly related to the collapse of Mass attendance<sup>9</sup>. Predictably, given that in every liturgical celebration there are always people who do not take Holy Communion its values are lower than Mass. Young people, who are living through a period of great personal instability in which certainties are few and the sexual and emotional dimensions condition their faith experience, are prone to move away from the Eucharist. For the believers, taking the Holy Communion requires some preconditions, whose fulfilment juvenile life inevitably precludes. The life of the youth is far more permissive and flexible, most of all during nights out and weekends.

In its turn, the decline of the Holy Communion is related to that of the confession<sup>10</sup>. This age group regards death as an event of a distant future and does not think about after-life. Young people avoid the most demanding sacraments, i.e. those which imply more availability, commitment and sacrifices. This makes difficult for youngsters to accept confession as legitimate. A few consider that they may confess their sins to God directly. In short, what is the use for a sacrament which claims that the redemption from sin is attained through the saving power of divine grace when sin and divine grace are not part of the youngsters' beliefs? The current life, steeped in materialism, immediacy, earthly salvations, indifferent to scatology, removes all sense of sin, grace, life after death and the corresponding rituals.

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<sup>9</sup> Applying the Spearman's correlation coefficient,  $r_s(492) = 0.793$ ,  $p=0.000$ , it is found that the correlation between Mass and Holy Communion is strong.

<sup>10</sup> Applying the Spearman's correlation coefficient,  $r_s(490) = 0.836$ ,  $p=0.000$ , it is found that the correlation between confession and Holy Communion is strong. The correlation between Mass and confession is medium strong but almost strong:  $r_s(492) = 0.732$ ,  $p=0.000$ .

When crossing eschatological Catholic beliefs and Catholic practices, prayer always gets the highest values, even if varying from weak to medium strong<sup>11</sup>. The interpretation of these results requires that the processes of privatization and individualization, strongly correlated with each other, are considered. As a result of these processes, religion is privately experienced by an individual, setting aside the institutions and the rituals that religion used to involve. Thus, prayer, concerning a personal relationship with the sacred, without institutional mediation (Mass, Holy Communion and confession), is the most accomplished result of religious individualization.

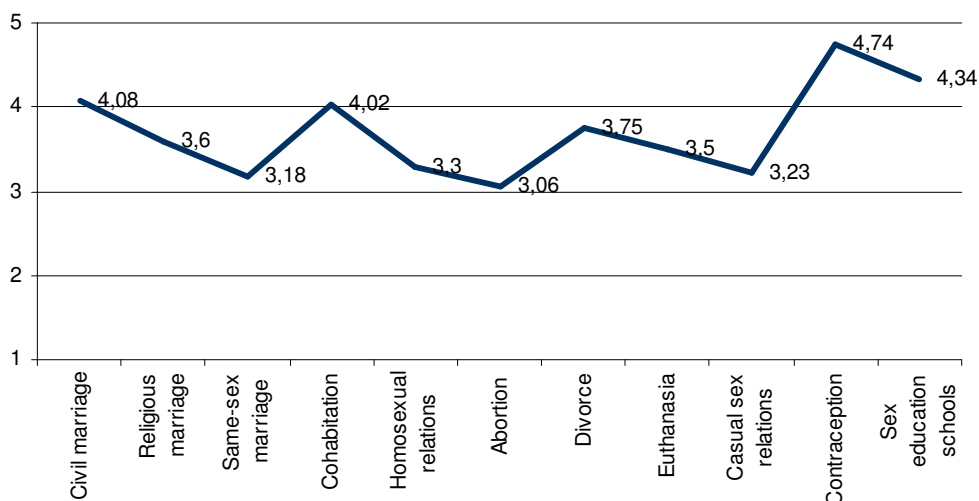
Although correlations are not strong, these results are indicative of modern, or indeed juvenile, religiosity. Spirituality, the relationship with the sacred, as opposed to religiosity, the institutional relationship with the sacred, is gaining ground amongst the Portuguese youth. The communitarian, liturgical and ritualistic practices are in decline. For the contemporary solipsism and narcissism, the “I” is king, lord and god. This outlook, characteristic of today’s youth, breaks down all forms of communal sharing of experiences about the sacred. Spirituality is more experienced and lived alone with little use for rituals and third parties.

### 3.10 Attitudes toward marriage, life and sexuality

The average ratings are between 3 and 5, i.e., between ‘some’ and ‘very’, with approbation of contraception and sex education at schools standing out as the highest and same-sex marriage, homosexual relations, abortion and casual sex relations in a lowest plane (figure 3). The results can be divided into four types, in ascending order of importance: abortion, same-sex marriage, casual sex relations and homosexual relations

<sup>11</sup> Crossing eschatological Catholic beliefs with Catholic practices, it is found the following: the values of heaven range between  $V(414) = 0.434, p=0.000$  (confession) and  $V(407) = 0.598, p=0.000$  (prayer) (both medium); of hell range between  $V(425) = 0.184, p=0.026$  (Mass) and  $V(415) = 0.331, p=0.000$  (prayer) (very weak to weak); of purgatory range between  $V(402) = 0.337, p=0.000$  (confession) and  $V(395) = 0.416, p=0.000$  (prayer) (weak to medium); of resurrection range between  $V(397) = 0.451, p=0.000$  (confession) and  $V(389) = 0.568, p=0.000$  (prayer) (both medium); of sin range between  $V(441) = 0.491, p=0.000$  (Holy Communion) and  $V(438) = 0.553, p=0.000$  (prayer) (both medium); of divine grace range between  $V(400) = 0.584, p=0.000$  (confession) and  $V(396) = 0.706, p=0.000$  (prayer) (medium to medium strong); of life after death range between  $V(394) = 0.381, p=0.000$  (confession) and  $V(387) = 0.518, p=0.000$  (prayer) (weak to medium).

(3.1 to 3.3); euthanasia, religious marriage and divorce (3.5 to 3.8); cohabitation, civil marriage and sex education at schools (4 to 4.3); contraception (4.7). According to EVS (2010), the equivalent averages are the following: cohabitation (3.2), homosexuality (2.5), abortion (2.5), divorce (3.1), euthanasia (2.4), casual sex relations (1.2), all lower than those of this study, which range between 3.2 and 4.



**Figure 3** - Averages of the attitudes

Looking to the components and crossing with the averages of their variables, one can find that homosexuality ranges between 3.18 and 3.3, convenience between 3.06 and 3.75, contraception between 4.02 and 4.74 and marriage between 3.18 and 3.6. The most accepted component is contraception; in intermediate terms is convenience and marriage; the least adopted is homosexuality.<sup>12</sup>

A first reading of these data shows that youngsters are in favour of safe and secure (contraception) and informed (sex education at schools) sexuality, but less receptive to heterodox behaviours (same-sex marriage, casual sex relations and homosexual relations). At the same time, the defence of life, both in the initial state (abortion) and terminal state

<sup>12</sup> From principal components analysis with the eleven attitudes, four components were extracted: homosexuality (homosexual relations and same-sex marriage), convenience (casual sex relations, euthanasia, abortion and divorce), contraception (contraception, sex education at schools and cohabitation) and marriage (civil marriage and religious marriage)

(euthanasia) seems to make sense for them<sup>13</sup>. The various forms of marital status (religious marriage, cohabitation and civil marriage) are quite approved, especially the latter and less so the former, with divorce largely recognized and accepted.

As stated by Cerezo and Serrano (2006, p. 35), sexuality has great importance in the lives of young people, with the condom being one of their symbols. Today, although it is associated with a certain risk behaviour and overcoming limits, the condom or the pill are objects that can be related to boys and girls, which are part of their culture and their regular practice. Partying, linked with alcohol and freedom of mores, affects the sexual behaviour of youngsters, inducing them to practice sex. Probably they would have a different behaviour if less social and more sober. This is evident not only in the usual hangouts that are subject to undergraduate students during their time at university, but also in university parties, where alcoholic consumption sometimes reaches high proportions. Interestingly, in this study, youngsters do not consider themselves very adept of casual sex relations, which may indicate their actual behaviour or the fear of exposing something so intimate even in surveys where anonymity is guaranteed<sup>14</sup>.

Homosexuality<sup>15</sup>, considered as a deviant behaviour until a few decades ago, has been gradually more accepted by society; even if the acceptance does not imply that people actually are willing to practice it. The fact that the behaviour has not changed despite a more favourable opinion might explain that homosexuality is less rated by the respondents. Perhaps future generations, who will be educated about sexuality at schools, will have an even more benign attitude towards homosexuality.

With regard to marital status and its rupture, the respondents accept cohabitation and divorce. In this case, the opinion follows the behaviour as both are increasingly used by the Portuguese, the former as a first step or as an alternative to marriage and the latter as a form of disruption when they consider there are no more conditions to continue.

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, applying Pearson's correlation coefficient between abortion and euthanasia, this is medium:  $r(473) = 0.523, p=0.000$ .

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, applying Pearson's correlation coefficient between casual sex relations and contraception, this is very weak:  $r(490) = 0.234, p=0.000$ .

<sup>15</sup> The Pearson's correlation coefficient between same-sex marriage and homosexual relations is strong, almost very strong:  $r(482) = 0.864, p=0.000$ .

At any rate, both religious and civil marriages are quite valued by respondents, even if, again, this does not imply that this behaviour will be practiced. In this case, unlike homosexuality, the two types of marriage, especially the religious, may not be an objective to reach a younger phase of adult life, but only when there are children, marital status is more stable or love is more consolidated.

In a world with increasing diversions, distractions and requests, where the sources of marital disruption are many, the risks of marriage are greater. Thus, this adventure is increasingly left for a later stage. Youngsters, who might be suffering from parents' divorce, might consider needless or unnecessary marriage and prefer to live together and experience marital relationship before moving on to more serious commitment. Also, being disinclined to sacrifice, compromise and long-term planning, they may see marriage as something distant, inappropriate to their lifestyle.

## **Conclusions**

This paper presents the main parameters of Catholic beliefs and practices, as well as attitudes toward marriage, life and sexuality among Portuguese undergraduate students. Approximately half of the inquired are assumed Catholics. They claim to possess some degree of spirituality and that earthly behaviour has little or some influence in life after death.

The importance of God is also situated between few and some. For the inquired, God is mainly regarded as a 'Superior power', with 'Personal God', 'Spirit or life force' and 'Nature' equally common conceptions. Agnostic and atheistic positions, whose values are nearly the same as the Catholic, are also noteworthy.

Within those who consider themselves as Catholic, almost half believes in some of the representations about God (eternity, uniqueness and trinity), and more than half believe in some Catholic representations about Jesus ('Man and God', 'Founder of the Church'). As of Catholic representations of Mary, less than half believes in some of them ('Mother of God'). The values of Catholic beliefs are low, with the highest being papal succession, sin, heaven and life after death and the lowest papal infallibility, hell, purgatory, resurrection and divine grace.

The number of baptized is quite high, unlike the confirmed. The regular frequency of Catholic practices is considerably low, although the number of people who pray is higher. Prayer apart, Mass is the most common practice. Holy Communion has a similar regular practice, despite its null practice is significantly higher. Values for regular confession are almost null, being only occasionally practiced.

In the attitudes towards aspects of marriage, life and sexuality, the acceptance is dispersed between 'some' and 'very'. The highest acceptance relates to contraception; the medium are in sex education at schools, civil marriage, cohabitation, divorce, religious marriage; the lowest are in euthanasia, homosexual relations, casual sex relations, same-sex marriage and abortion.

In broad terms, one can say that belief is stronger than practice, as well as to the observance of Church rules. Indeed, whilst belief does not imply commitment, practice does. The indifference towards rules also reflects the lack of practice.

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